

Measuring Vietnamese-speaking English as a foreign language students' socio-emotional skills

Do Minh Hung, Le Thanh Nguyet Anh, Vo Phan Thu Ngan, Pham Van Tac, Bui Thanh Tinh

Foreign Languages Faculty, Dong Thap University, Dong Thap, Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

Socio-emotional skills are crucial in learning processes and academic performances, but research in this field among college students, especially among Vietnamese-speaking students majoring in English as a foreign language (EFL) is still rare. Thus, the study attempts to fill this gap. As the first necessary part of a larger research project, the present study measured the target population's socio-emotional skills via a 30-item questionnaire scale made up of two core components (the self and the others) embracing five subcomponents (self-awareness, self-regulation, self-utilization, empathy, and social skills). The sample group of 615 EFL majors from a university in Vietnam was surveyed. Statistic survey results show that the group appeared to reach a high level of socio-emotional skills in general. In addition, there was no significant gap between two core components, but five subcomponents stood out in a descending magnitude line of self-awareness>self-utilization, empathy>social skills>self-regulation. These significant findings provide constructive guidance needed for our research team to project instructional action plans in the subsequent phases. It also provokes further research on similar strands within Vietnam and beyond.

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Corresponding Author:

Do Minh Hung

Foreign Languages Faculty, Dong Thap University

783 Pham Huu Lau, Ward 6, Cao Lanh City, Dong Thap, Vietnam

Email: dmhung@dthu.edu.vn

1. INTRODUCTION

Classroom-based research in social-emotional skills underpinned fundamentally by emotional intelligence/literacy (i.e., the ability to productively handle emotions and moods perceived in oneself and others) has been recently conducted in many countries. The research line is on a noticeable growth partly because the young generation's socio-emotional wellness appeals to globally increasing concerns and also because school climate inherently serves as a driver for personal, social well-being, and emotional growth alongside academic achievements [1], [2]. With this in mind, the present study made a further attempt to probe these concerns with special reference to Vietnamese English as a foreign language (EFL) students' socio-cultural characterizations and learning specifications. However, first of all, the theoretical framework related to social-emotional skills and reasons for incorporating these skills into regular learning programs are presented in the following sections.

Socio-emotional skills are made up of two universally broad dimensions: the self and the others [1]–[16]. The self primarily contains self-awareness/perception helping one attend to, clearly identify, locate, and understand his/her emotions in viable variations historically. Self-awareness is an essential antecedent for other socio-emotional skills such as self-regulation/management. A well-established self-awareness skill guides people to rapidly recognize emotional states, self-moderate rational thoughts, spontaneously strong

emotional behaviors, and moods. More importantly, in negative emotion-triggering situations, it helps people keep calm, and not fall into the position of getting angry, envious, or cautionlessly jumping into making impulsive, irrational decisions or taking extremist actions (i.e., escaping one's control boundaries). Furthermore, on the positive side of self-regulation and self-utilization, a strong self-awareness skill generates self-confidence, self-efficacy, self-identity, and a sense of optimism and evolution. Thus, highly self-aware people willingly and honestly look at themselves and know their strengths and weaknesses, which can be effectively manipulated in most cases for mental workings, verbal interactions, emotional communication, expressivity, and performances. They are typically motivated, readily taking calculated challenges, and making responsible, informed decisions in a productively long-term acting course responding effectively to given situations.

Ontologically, as the second core component of socio-emotional skills, the others embrace empathy (or social perceptions) and social skills (or social utilizations/manipulations) grounded on a growth-open mindset. Empathy (i.e., socio-emotional sensitivity and expressivity) fundamentally promotes people extrinsically to capture, decode, and make good interpretations of others around them (e.g., family members, relatives, and friends) concerning their emotional states, spontaneous moods, concerns, needs, feelings, attitudes, and perspectives/views. Especially, it is the ability to experience what others suffer and feel like that pain is happening to one via activating similar emotions and sensations. On top of that, empathy leads people to take pro-social behaviors to reduce suffering and latent pains. Social skills intelligence enables one as a socially role-playing interlocutor/involved subject to well regulate multiple relations and interdependences with other people around. Those with high, productive well-trained social skills are tactful, self-confident, socially adept, and sophisticated. They appear to be assertively skilled, actively initiate conversations effortlessly with both acquaintances and strangers, and volitionally listen to other people's voices. They also make attempts to settle possible conflicts and jointly proceed towards shared goals and positive growth, both at individual, collective, and cross-cultural levels. Grounding on these socially emotional regulation approaches, pro-social acts of volunteering, charity, communal collaboration, caregiving, and so on are likely to take place and recur frequently, meaningfully, and approvingly, especially in Vietnam's long-established cultural rules and norms at large [17], [18]. On the contrary, aggressive conduct and antisocial behaviors such as social-media terrorism, bullying, fire-setting, human trafficking, hostility, aggression, cruelty, and assaults are diminished or hardly find their place. Thus, pragmatically socio-emotional learning for developed emotional literacy is to reach true human values and quality of life, making every single one's life worth living. In other words, socio-emotional skills provide us with valid, constructive mediating instruments to evolve historically and live better with the fullest enjoyment of life.

Investigative attempts in this regard have so far repeatedly documented robust benefits from socio-emotional learning. These benefits cover both academic and non-academic aspects attached to educational domains in learning and teaching activities. The following are typical benefits;

- i) Academic success [1]–[11]: Students acquire cognitive development, self-trust, self-confidence/efficacy, and sustained commitments for ongoing evolution and contributions;
- ii) Attitudes: [1], [6], [8], [16]: Students are internalized to respect, honor, appreciate, and earn the core values of freedom, self-reflection, constructive thinking, critical acceptance, resilience, and refinement;
- iii) Skills [2], [7], [11]: Students are well-prepared for the increasingly complex and globalized world of intercultural perspectives, inclusive-diverse practices, global cohesion, and mutual collaborations to deal with multiple unprecedented fears and solve global problems timely and effectively;
- iv) Pro-social acts/behaviors [1], [6], [8], [12]: School content culture for social activities is validly founded. These include constructive interrelations, interdependences, belonging, trustful relationships, professional identities, ethic codes, practice community, school agencies, and strong resilience at all levels (institutional shareholders, teacher-teacher, teacher-student, student-student). Meanwhile, those polarized, offensive, or extremist behaviors such as verbal violence, aggression, bullying, and fighting, are mitigated or eliminated, and
- v) Pedagogical innovations, inter-professional collaboration [5], [6], [8]: Teachers are encouraged together to participate in initiating and cultivating students' socio-emotional skills, and civic attitudes in one way or another.

As a consequence, when social-emotional skills are purposefully highlighted and sharpened in school-based settings, it will likely set a new light on educating learners holistically and securing a balance between cognitive development and affective wellbeing. This ultimately implies that once matured in this regard, people in general and students in particular are substantively empowered to confidently, proactively, and effectively approach and solve life problems, personally, collectively, and beyond. Although socio-emotional learning viably generates enormous benefits, this construct-based line of research is still far from sufficient in Asian countries [1], [4]–[6] like Vietnam, especially where the current learning setting establishes a good playground for socio-emotional skills to be learned, practiced, and flourished towards a

well-rounded human development of productive functioning [17], [18]. As a result, the present study is set to investigate the theme of socio-emotional training in the current Vietnam educational landscape. Like other countries around the world [1], [5], the current post-Covid educational chapter presently poses multiple challenges to schools, teachers, and students not only in the intellectual sphere for growth but also in the psychological space, mental health, social interactions and skills on both traditional face-to-face and virtual backgrounds [19]–[21]. As a result, research on socio-emotional learning should stay alive and underway to help students develop crucial skills facing effectively life problems, especially in the current setting of Vietnam. Furthermore, it is reasonably argued that those with high socio-emotional skills are likely to become constructive inspirations to others for mutual trust, goodwill, and pro-social acts [2], [3], [5], [8].

The present study is necessarily helpful because the obtained results are to empirically pinpoint the current level (the 2023-2024 academic year) of Vietnamese-speaking EFL students' socio-emotional skills. Thereby, subsequent classroom-based training programs could be inherently and responsively projected for classroom practices tailored to our specific learning/teaching environments of administrative organization, cultural values, and involved learners [17], [18]. In the epistemological sense, the present study also helps contest the significant role of socio-emotional entry in the educational space, where it is still far from an exhaustive, rigorous scope of breadth and depth scrutinized [1], [7], [11], [16] locally and globally. As theoretically synthesized and outlined concerning its viable learning advantages, socio-emotional skills are more or less serving as a predictor and a directly mediating driver towards academic achievement (i) and other inherent human values or significantly-recognized credits for students (ii)–(v) in the 21st century's world and further in the human historical lifeline. Highlighting the benefits of socio-emotional learning to human beings, Chowkase [1] posited that “emotions are a rich source of information about oneself and others, which can help expand our circle of concern. Additionally, comprehending the impact of our emotions on others and vice versa can help prevent emotional harm from being inflicted on either party.”

Another justification for the present study is that most previous research underscored the positive correlation between socio-emotional competence and academic dimension, but very few pertinent works [1], [5], [6], [22]–[24] deliberately or deeply discern perceived correlations or the interplay between the two core components of the socio-emotional construct of the self and the others as well as attached subcomponents or discrete domains: self-awareness, self-regulation, self-utilization, empathy, and social skills. To our knowledge, detailed information about these issues is still far from sufficient in the existing literature [2], [16], especially applied to students of English as a foreign language, who have to undergo long and several dynamic, complex linguistic aspects and learning phases distinctive from those for students of other career-oriented disciplines [4]. Additionally, our current learning setting constantly exposes EFL students to a high volume of interacting with others (close friends, peers, and teachers) using the English language in the classroom and outside. Empirically, when it comes to language learning, students rationally and imperatively need to decently cultivate and exercise these basic social skills in daily communication, in interpersonal encounters at least frequently in the classroom as much as possible in the mediating form of collaborative group/pair work [16], [25]–[32], where students have much social opportunity of sharing and taking turns. With those practical foregoing elements associated with socio-emotional skills, the present study is to measure the intended students' current socio-emotional skills by posing two core guiding research questions:

- i) At what level are the current socio-emotional skills of the sample group, regarding the two core components of the self and the others?
- ii) What are latent gaps or discrepancies between the two core components and among the subcomponents exposed by the sample group?

2. METHOD

2.1. Research design phase

Based on the valid existing literature [1]–[16] for guidance, the current study was qualitatively framed as the initial, necessary part of a larger, longitudinal research on concrete dispositions of students' socio-emotional skills at a university in Vietnam, where there was no previous educational work addressing this theme recorded officially, especially among the target student population. Since our research team was all specialized in EFL teaching, this qualitative survey was conducted involving 615 EFL-majored students from the research-site university. Thus, the sample size is larger than 500, which is accepted as an adequate sample size for a qualitative research study [33]–[36].

The participants were all full-time students in the 2023 to 2024 academic year, aged between 18 to 24, speaking Vietnamese as the first language and (at the time of the survey) mostly commanding an approximately intermediate English proficiency level [37]. Furthermore, they almost shared the entire educational background historically in this Asian-culture country quite recently (primary to secondary education) before entering university for higher education. This convenient homogeneous target group was chosen because the subsequent surveyed results were deemed to supportively guide the research team for the

next steps of instructional actions. Accordingly, we will project to run socio-emotional learning interventions of concrete practices adequately subordinating the current content of EFL courses undertaken by this target group in their regular training program schedules across the intended population at the university. Such a socio-emotional skill-developing approach has yet to be implemented at this institution, specifically for this EFL major student population. Additionally, drawn on English input materials these regular courses advantageously deploy English input resources of socio-emotional learning diversely and digitally accessible for teachers and students. However, first, we needed to fully and deliberately capture the current level of the target population's socio-emotional skills associated with critically valid components before moving into the practice phases. That said, at this point, the questionnaire designing was essential as a preliminary phase for the following phases targeted.

There are now several relevant questionnaire scales available for use [7], [11], [12], [16], our research team approached jointly self-designing a new one because we aimed to produce an easy-operating self-report questionnaire instrument, which sufficiently provided enough empirical premises for the next phases of our long-term research project of socio-emotional training. As a result, grounding on EFL education at this Asian university about its formally-established settings, core civic values, and socio-cultural norms alongside the relevant literature [1], [2], [5]–[7], [17], [18]. The researchers deliberately discussed and set the specific criteria for the target questionnaire scale. In addition, we knowingly defined that each single item in the scale was expected to unambiguously represent one socio-emotional sub-skill significant for EFL students' pragmatic learning and life functions.

On these framework premises, we then designed, double-checked, and cross-reviewed the scale validity, coherence, unambiguousness, and strong consistency. Specifically, we worked on the subcomponent contents, structural ordering, and wording of every single item shaped in the questionnaire scale. Also, each of our team members functioned neatly as an independent auditor to ensure the scale's validity and reliability. After that, on piloting and obtaining Cronbach alpha value=0.82 as a reliable one, our questionnaire scale (apart from asking for personal information on age, gender, and years of English learning), comprises 30 statement items as seen in Table 1. Accordingly, these 30 items are distributed between the two components and among five subcomponents. Each of the items is immediately attached by familiarly a 5-option set for the respondent's free choice related to their specific cases perceived by themselves. It typically ranges from "strongly disagree" (1 point earned) at one end to "strongly agree" (5 points earned) at the other end.

Table 1. Socio-emotional questionnaire scale

Components	Subcomponents	Item N.	Example given
(i) The self	Self-awareness	9	You are well aware of your own positive and negative emotions.
	Self-regulation	5	Looking at your failures seriously is essential for improvement and to prevent risks of negative emotions emerging.
	Self-utilization	6	Positive emotions help you reason smartly and make sound decisions for contingent actions.
(ii) The others	Empathy	5	You can effortlessly capture other people's positive and negative emotions.
	Social skills	5	You willingly listen to others' voices, and opinions, and honestly share your constructive ideas with them.

2.2. Data collection and analysis phases

For ethical concerns in the data collection phase, following the obtained approval officially granted by this university and Foreign Language Faculty, our research team members (who each has also undertaken the teaching role full-time) came into each face-to-face class of the sample group and briefly informed the students of our research project in terms of its aims, significance, intended participants and operational phases projected. The target students also did gain the transparent notion that the survey was anonymous, i.e., no personal information was revealed throughout the research project as well as in the result report. In addition, they could freely decline to take part in the questionnaire survey because it would impact no part of their learning assessment (either the mid-term course test or the end-course examination as usual). In other words, students were free to join the planned survey. Those who chose to partake proceeded to do it right in the classroom and it took them approximately 10 minutes to complete the questionnaire survey. Then, all the responded questionnaire copies were collected for further analysis. Next, the whole team jointly worked on scrutinizing all returned questionnaire copies, followed by running normal statistic tests using the software SPSS program.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Deriving from our EFL teaching-learning setting, which requires substantial and frequent social practices in the classroom and outside via verbal and nonverbal interactions between teachers and students, and among student-peers per se, the present study was shaped as an exploratory diagnosis to measure the sample group's socio-emotional skills. This matters pragmatically a great deal because the prospective results will helpfully and significantly guide us (as a classroom-teacher research team) in approaching the subsequent phases. They include intensively embarking on designing, running, and reflecting on interventions of the socio-emotional learning viably applied to the intended population for strengthening their latently-related knowledge, cultivating, and advantageously possessing socio-emotional skills conducive to EFL learning at our university. This is primarily because these skills are learned social abilities and strategies creating strong antecedents (supportively driven by a socio-emotional learning climate) for individuals' life-long affective-cognitive evolution and well-being attained [1], [2], [5], [8], [16]. Furthermore, when it comes to the secondary-to-tertiary education transition, realistic college life poses several challenges to college students, especially regarding the post-COVID pandemic age [19]–[21], the present study results leading to intended follow-ups are significant in terms of beneficial potentials for students' academic, mental, and psychological wellbeing.

3.1. Obtaining the scale's validity and reliability

First, our research team ran the SPSS-based reliability of the questionnaire scale applied in the present study and the result showed a high-reliability value: Cronbach's $\alpha=0.902$. In addition, for further analysis, we also wanted to know if any discrete presence of the 30 items in the total scale appeared to be redundant (meaning that it should be deleted to increase the reliability value of the total scale). Table 2 presents the results from the SPSS test. Accordingly, each item displays its correlation value to the total scale in column A, while column B is the Cronbach's α value of the total scale if that item is deleted from the scale.

Table 2. Item-total correlation (A) and Cronbach's α (B) resulting from item deletion

Item	A	B	Item	A	B	Item	A	B
1	.366	.900	11	.346	.901	21	.407	.899
2	.434	.899	12	.519	.897	22	.387	.900
3	.448	.899	13	.535	.897	23	.360	.901
4	.514	.897	14	.488	.898	24	.429	.899
5	.524	.897	15	.443	.899	25	.472	.898
6	.562	.897	16	.427	.899	26	.497	.898
7	.477	.898	17	.480	.898	27	.402	.900
8	.533	.897	18	.453	.899	28	.501	.898
9	.326	.901	19	.491	.898	29	.531	.897
10	.445	.899	20	.570	.896	30	.500	.898

As seen in Table 2, all items indicate a good value of item-total correlation coefficient: all values are positive and above 0.30 (A) up to 0.570 (item 20). Moreover, all items are justifiably needed because the deletion of any among them would reduce the reliability value of the total scale (B), i.e., smaller than 0.902 (total scale reliability). Thus, the questionnaire is soundly reliable and all items are needed. This is significant in the present study because we will confidently reuse this questionnaire scale as a post-instrument to assess the impact of the planned socio-emotional intervention program on the intended population of EFL students for the subsequent steps. This is also a significant contribution of the present study because, to our knowledge, no sufficient questionnaire scale measuring Vietnamese-speaking EFL students' social-emotional skills has been found in the relevant literature [1]–[16].

3.2. Results for research questions

As addressed earlier two research questions were posed by the present study. The obtained survey results are shown in Table 3. Thus, the sample group's social-emotional skills level is demonstrated by the mean value of the scale total at the bottom of Table 3. The table shows detailed mean values of the two components: the self and the others.

As seen from Table 3, the mean scale total of $M=4.05$ (out of 5 points) indicates that the surveyed group appeared to reach a high level of socio-emotional skills across the board with a minimum of 3.44 points. This high level is partly accounted for by the fact that the group is homogeneous adults (aged 18 to 24). This age-related assumption is supported by previous research [3], [4], [7], [9], [10], [12], [15], [16]. Previous study [3] showed that 444 primary school students from Ethiopia were assessed at an average level of emotional intelligence. Among 330 high school Chinese students, their emotional control was rated only at a low and moderate level in English learning. Similarly, involving 303 school students, aged 12 to 16,

from Arabic schools in China, previous research [10] recorded less than 40% of participants scored a high and very high level of emotional intelligence. Most high school Indonesian students [12] also scored just at an average level.

Table 3. Questionnaire scale statistic results (N=615)

Components	Subcomponents	Max.	Min.	Means
(i) The self		4.38	3.44	4.06
	- Self-awareness	4.38	3.99	4.14
	- Self-regulation	4.23	3.44	3.86
	- Self-utilization	4.27	3.88	4.09
(ii) The others		4.31	3.71	4.04
	- Empathy	4.31	3.86	4.09
	- Social skills	4.15	3.71	3.99
Scale total		4.38	3.44	4.05

Meanwhile, a high level of social-emotional skills displayed by the EFL group in the present study appears to match the findings reported in a recent investigation by Çelik and Çetinkaya [16] among 334 Turkish college learners of English. The same results were also reported by 280 students aged 18-24 from Nepal [15], and 80 Saudi undergraduate students [9]. On the contrary, college students' positive academic emotions were released only at an average level [23]. In other words, the age variable could be one emotional determinant, but reviewing 27 studies on emotional domains during the 2010 to 2020 periods across countries, Quílez-Robres *et al.* [8] found no significant impact of age on emotional skills.

Another explanation for the high social-emotional level exhibited by the EFL group in the present study is attributed to Vietnam's long-standing educational system. This is because some forms of social-emotional skills are embedded in this public educational system from primary to secondary level, especially anchored in the subject of civic education [18]. The system is underpinned consistently by the core goal of building the learner's comprehensive qualities (mentally, aesthetically, emotionally, and ethically) and developing the person as a whole, including the moral and social domains. This system highlights the tendency to "prioritize the needs and goals of the group over those of the individual" [1]. Apart from official education, the role of family (parents and grandparents) in Asian cultures should not be marginalized in this regard. It contributes substantially to nurturing emotional competence [2], [16].

For the second research question, also from Table 3, the score level of the self-component ($M=4.06$) and that of the others ($M=4.04$) are neatly equal, suggesting that there is nearly no latent gap between these two core components exhibited by the group. In one sense, these neatly equating scores across the total scale confirm that socio-emotional dimensions are interrelated and relatively developed in the adulthood of college students; in another sense, it again implies the effects of Vietnam's educational system developing the child's comprehensive capacities synchronously (mentally, emotionally, and ethically) [18], [37].

In addition, scoring details given of the five subcomponents indicate that self-awareness tops the list ($M=4.14$), followed by both self-utilization and empathy ($M=4.09$). Meanwhile, self-regulation scores the least ($M=3.86$). For more detail, additional paired-variable SPSS tests were run to compare the highest mean $M=4.14$ and the lowest $M=3.86$, resulting in a statistically significant difference between these two means. Similarly, a significant difference was statistically displayed between $M=4.14$ and $M=3.99$ (subcomponent of social skills). These obtained findings show that as expected the target group appeared to have possessed a strong ability to immediately perceive how and understand why they feel in almost all life situations. Thus, as adult students, they were also deemed to be able to decently identify their positive and negative emotions as well as their strengths and weaknesses, especially applied in learning activities or academic settings. They also tended to relatively acquire skills of harnessing the benefits of positive emotions (self-utilization $M=4.09$) and empathy ($M=4.09$).

Since the statistical results from the present study reveal a latent gap between the group's emotional self-awareness and self-regulation with $M=4.14 > M=3.86$ as shown Table 3. This implies that there is still room for their self-regulation to be improved. Thus, Table 4 presents all five items with their mean scores cast in the subcomponent of self-regulation.

As seen from Table 4, three items scoring below 4 points are 12, 15, and 18 with means of $M=3.44$, 3.97 , and 3.50 , respectively. In the same way, we also examined the items shaped in the subcomponent of social skills, resulting in two below-4-point items standing out: item 22 (*You know, if necessary, who you should consult for productive advice and directions to overcome negative emotions, problems, or roadblocks in learning and other life-tasks*) and item 28 (*You know how to use verbal skills to resolve conflicts between you and others as well as between others themselves*).

Table 4. Five items in the subcomponent of self-regulation (N=615)

Items	Descriptors	Means
12	You have your tactics of combatting failures and challenges in learning and daily life.	3.44
13	In the face of failures, rather than feeling disappointed and giving up all your pursuits or passions, you deliberately reflect on these failures and draw out constructive experiences for your next action steps. You know well that deliberately reflecting on failures is one crucial life skill for personal growth.	4.16
14	The act of failure reflection is also a good strategy to prevent failures from potentially hurting your ongoing learning and other life tasks underway.	4.24
15	You have your ways of effectively balancing learning tasks and relaxing forms or refreshments for optimal effectiveness.	3.97

Overall, our survey-gained findings (measuring the target group's socio-emotional skills) can be tentatively projected on a descending-magnitude scale as self-awareness>self-utilization, empathy>social skills>self-regulation. These significant findings, as far as we are concerned, have yet to be clearly or exclusively highlighted for EFL college students from Vietnam and other countries in past pertinent research [1]–[16], [22]–[24]. Most relevant studies in Vietnam specifically focused on EFL learner's autonomy or self-regulated learning [27]–[29], [31]. Thus, theoretically, it provokes future studies contesting the descending-magnitude scale pointed out by the present study to examine whether it equally recurs across countries and college students of different disciplines (i.e., not just EFL students). If that is the case, it will shed more light on how students' social-emotional skills are universally shaped and developed, at least during their college life.

3.3. Implications for next phases

As expected, the present study's findings bring practical pedagogical implications to our research team. Accordingly, our socio-emotional training programs will target the core components of the intrapersonal skill repertoire (i.e., the self) and that of the interpersonal (i.e., the others). It will be projected to sharpen the former component for the intended population of students being able to better recognize, manage, and manipulate the self's emotional incidents, signs, or stimuli rationally and productively by teacher counseling activities alongside EFL subject contents granted regularly. Concurrently and alternatively, interpersonal skills are intentionally leveraged advantageously via daily classroom group/pair work followed by related activities behind the set school time. This approach of the intrapersonal-followed-by-interpersonal skills has been substantiated as productive by previous research on social-emotional domains [1]–[3].

In addition, drawing on the present study's findings and the notion that “it is important to stress the role played by the context and the school environment, because this has a direct effect on the student's skills” [8], our multiple training techniques will purposefully be coordinated by task-based/project-based learning and club activities (e.g., music, festivals, sports competitions, English language speaking contests, Gala nights, social work, charities, summertime activities, and so on). Over the interventional course, those activities of close recording, on-track keeping, and outcome-reflecting (built on students' on-spot responses and self-reports retrospectively) are consistently manipulated by the entire research team as well. As addressed earlier, our research team also recognizes that for maturely skilled performance, this socio-emotional learning process will have to be executed on a reiterative, interchangeably dynamic, long-term basis compatibly tuning into students' ongoing growth in terms of the three fundamental human domains of biology, psychology, and intellect [1]–[16]. Moreover, these three domains, though discrete, are intimately interrelated and equally shape the typical process of learning over the years of one's lifeline unfolding, which exactly matches Vietnam's educational policies [17], [18].

In addition, over our two year training project, we will re-measure participants' emotional intelligence and academic performance after every academic semester to document the possible effects of the learning intervention and their emotional growth trajectories. In that way, we can reference the recommendation that “The wide-scale adoption of universal assessments of student social-emotional competence (SEC) in educational practice may lead to accumulation of useful data that can contribute to our knowledge of how student SEC develops within and across school years across various contexts” [7]. Apart from that, we will involve the variable of gender (males and females) for a better understanding of the relationship between gender and emotional intelligence. This is because, in their study, AL-Qadri and Zhao pointed out that “females are more conscious of their feelings, display more sensitivity, and have better interpersonal skills than males” [10].

4. CONCLUSION

Given a deficit in research on Vietnamese-speaking EFL students' socio-emotional skills and learning programs, especially in the current post-COVID era widely perceived with certain risks encountered by students at large, this preliminary study measured the socio-emotional skills of a college student group from Vietnam. One strength of this study is that it was the first to involve a large sample of 615 EFL major students, and the second strength is a 30-item questionnaire scale was sufficiently designed and conducted as expected. More importantly, the present study reached its set aims.

As can be seen, the results show that the sample group appeared to acquire a high level of socio-emotional skills and there was generally no significant discrepancy between the self-component and the others-component. However, the five subcomponents in the scale stood in a descending magnitude line with the self-awareness subcomponent at the top and that of self-regulation at the bottom. That means there is a significant gap between the group's self-awareness skill and that of self-regulation. These factual results not only specify the current level of the target group's socio-emotional skills (which has yet to be recorded in past pertinent research) but also helpfully provide practical implications to our research team in projecting the subsequent training program. These include selecting ample social-emotional learning materials and sequencing various strategies, which soundly coordinate regular content courses structured in the EFL major training program.

Furthermore, based on the survey results, we will involve all five subcomponents dynamically and concurrently, but more attention will fall on self-regulation and social skills. On the other hand, more research in this regard within Vietnam contexts and beyond is encouraged to overcome the present study's limitations. Thus, future research should expand sample sizes for better generalization and contest the item contents of the questionnaire scale used in the present study. Participants should be both college students majoring in EFL and those of other disciplines because emotional intelligence is crucial and beneficial to human life. Furthermore, the role of the family in this topic is another window for research interests and investments.

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BIOGRAPHIES OF AUTHORS






Do Minh Hung    has been teaching English at Dong Thap University, Cao Lanh City, Dong Thap Province, Vietnam, for more than 30 years. He holds a doctoral degree in Linguistics and has published several journal articles, both locally and internationally, in the areas of English instruction. He can be contacted at email: dmhung@dthu.edu.vn.






Le Thanh Nguyet Anh    is a lecturer of English in Foreign Languages Faculty at Dong Thap University, Cao Lanh City, Dong Thap Province, Vietnam. She has taught English for 24 years. Her research fields are EFL teaching methodology, testing and assessment, learner autonomy, and EFL students' emotions. She can be contacted at email: ltnanh@dthu.edu.vn






Vo Phan Thu Ngan    currently works at Dong Thap University, Vietnam as an EFL lecturer for major and non-major students. Her main interests revolve around the use of technology to promote English language teaching and learning, English skills development, discourse analysis, and academic writing. She can be contacted at email: vptngan@dthu.edu.vn.



Pham Van Tac    is an MA holder of English language and has been working as a teacher of English in Dong Thap University for more than 25 years. His studies and publications, both locally and internationally, are on Vietnam's current education matters, EFL students' language learning, and translation practice. He can be contacted at email: pvtac@dthu.edu.vn.



Bui Thanh Tinh    is an EFL teacher who has been working at Dong Thap University for more than six years. His research interests revolve around the innovation in English language teaching, and testing and assessment. He can be contacted at email: bttinh@dthu.edu.vn.